

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PHNOM 05344 01 OF 02 311450 Z

42

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 /026 W

----- 088146

R 310945 Z MAY 73

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1464

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

CINCPAC

COMUSSAG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 5344

EXDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (T E X T)

STATE PASS AID

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, CB

SUBJECT: IN TAM AND HIS PROBLEMS AS PRIME MINISTER

1. SUMMARY. IN TAM ASKED ME TO HIS OFFICE MAY 30 TO DISCU M FS OF THE PROBLEMS HE FACES, INCLUDING HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH LON NOL, WHICH IS NOT A HAPPY ONE. I OFFERED HIM EVERY ENCOURAGEMENT, SAID THAT I THOUGHT HE HAD GOT OFF TO A GOOD START, AND PROMISED HIM OUR SUPPORT TO MAINTAIN THE INTEGRITY AND AUTHORITY OF THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL. END SUMMARY.

2. ALWAYS SOMEWHAT MOROSE, IN TAM WAS IN A GENERALLY DOWNCAST FRAME OF MIND. HE SAID THAT THE MARSHAL IS SEEKING IN ANY NUMBER OF WAYS TO RE- ESTABLISH HIS DOMINANCE: HE HAS MADE AN ABORTIVE EFFORT TO APPOINT ADDITIONAL SPECIAL ASSISTANTS AND COUNSELORS, HAS SOUGHT TO CREATE A SPECIAL JURISDICTION IN KOMPONG SOM , THUS PROLIFERATING ADMINISTRATIVE CONFUSION; AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, IS TRYING TO KEEP MILITARY AFFAIRS UNDER

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PAGE 02 PHNOM 05344 01 OF 02 311450 Z

HIS PERSONAL PURVIEW. IN TAM SAID THAT THE MARSHAL CONTINUES TO INSIST THAT THE COMMANDER- IN- CHIEF HAVE A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP TO HIMSELF AS SUPREME COMMANDER OF THE ARMED FORCES, WHILE THE THREE OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS WANT THE POSITION DIRECTLY SUBORDINATE TO THE GOVERNMENT. THE OUTCOME OF THIS CONFRONTATION IS STILL IN DOUBT.

3. IN TAM ALSO REPORTED THAT THE MARSHAL IS CREATING, EITHER UNCONSCIOUSLY OF DELIERATELY, AN ATMOSPHERE OF DISTRUST IN THE COUNCIL. AT ITS MAY 20 MEETING, THE MARSHAL CONFRONTED THE THREE WITH A REPORT, ALLEGEDLY ORIGINATING QTE WITH THE AMERICANS UNQTE, THAT A COUP IS BEING PLOTTED AGAINST HIM, IN EFFECT ACCUSING THEM OF COMPLICITY IN IT. IN TAM REMARKED WEARILY THAT DISAGREEABLE EXCHANGES OF THIS SORT CONSIDERABLY COMPLICATE HIS EFFORTS TO GOVERN EFFECTIVELY.

4. I COMMENTED THAT HE SHOULD EXPECT THE MARSHAL AFTER A LONG PERIOD OF AUTHORITARIAN RULE TO EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS IN ADJUSTING TO THE NEW ORDER. THE THREE SHOULD BEAR WITH HIM BUT NOT SURRENDER ON POINTS OF PRINCIPLE. I PROMISED OUR SUPPORT WHENEVER NEEDED TO MAKE THE COUNCIL A VIABLE MECHANISM OF RULE. I ALSO PROMISED OUR SUPPORT FOR HIM AND HIS GOVERNMENT. AS FOR A POSSIBLE COUP AND THE MARSHAL' S STATEMENT THAT HE HAD LEARNED ABOUT IT FROM AMERICANS, I DISMISSED BOTH THE IDEA OF A COUP AND THE REPORT AS TOTAL FABRICATIONS, AND I SUGGESTED THE COUNCIL FORGET ABOUT THEM AND GET DOWN TO THE VERY REAL PROBLEMS AHEAD.

5. IN TAM SEEMED TO TAKE ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THIS EXCHANGE, AND WE THEN REVIEWED, IN RATHER SUMMARY FASHION, SOME OF THE MORE PRESSING PROBLEMS.

A. HE IS CLEARLY DISTURBED ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF ANY TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF OUR AIR SUPPORT. I EMPHASIZED THE LIKELIHOOD OF CONGRESSIONAL ACTION TO DO SO, POINTING OUT THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD NEVERTHELESS CONTINUE TO DO HIS BEST IN A VERY DIFFICULT SITUATION TO HELP THE GKR ABD THAT THAT CRITICALITY OF AIR SUPPORT TO THE REPUBLIC, CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 PHNOM 05344 01 OF 02 311450 Z

IF AT REDUCED LEVELS, IS CLEARLY PERCEIVED IN WASHINGTON .

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PAGE 01 PHNOM 05344 02 OF 02 311030 Z

11
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COMUSSAG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 5344

EXDIS

STATE PASS AID

B. IN TAM IS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT THE RICE PROBLEM IN ITS VARIOUS ASPECTS: SUPPLY, PRICE, AND EFFECTIVE DISTRIBUTION. I INFORMED HIM THAT WE ARE IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE SAPHON SARASY ON OVERALL REQUIREMENTS; THAT WE HAVE MADE A SPECIAL PLEA FOR A FURTHER EMERGENCY ALLOCATION OF PL-480 RICE THIS SUMMER; THAT WE ARE ASSISTING WITH PROCUREMENT IN THAILAND; AND THAT CONVOYS MUST BE MOBILIZED AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE RE- OPNEING OF HIGHWAY 5 TO BATTAMBANG AND ITS RICE SURPLUS.

C. CONCERNING THE IMF PROPOSAL TO PERMIT UPWARD ADJUSTMENTS IN THE PRICE OF RICE AND TO AUTHORIZE SOME INCREASE IN PAY TO FUNCTIONARIES AND THE MILITARY, I COMMENTED THAT WE AGREE WITH THIS PROPOSAL BUT RECOMMEND THAT ACTIONS TO RAISE PRICES AND WAGES BE TAKEN SIMULTANEOUSLY. I NOTED THAT WE HAVE IN PREPARATION SOME SUGGESTIONS ON ECONOMIC POLICY SUPPLEMENTING THOSE OF THE IMF WHICH WE SHALL SHORTLY SUBMIT FOR HIS CONSIDERATION.

D. ON MILITARY AFFAIRS, I STRESSED THE NEED FOR IMMEDIATE RECRUITMENT OF REPLACEMENTS FOR UNDERSTRENGTH UNITS.
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PAGE 02 PHNOM 05344 02 OF 02 311030 Z

IN TAM COMMENTED THAT HE HAS PERSONAL RESERVATIONS

CONCERNING A PROGRAM OF OBLIGATORY MILITARY SERVICE;
IT MAY SIMPLY NOT PROVE ADMINISTERABLE IN THE SHORT TERM
AND COULD EVOKE MORE POPULAR RESENTMENT THAN SUPPORT. I
OBSERVED THAT HE MUST BE THE JUDGE OF THIS, BUT SOME
RECRUITMENT THROUGH WHATEVER MEANS IS ESSENTIAL. I
ALSO RECOMMENDED THAT MAJOR- GENERAL SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ
BE RETAINED AS THE PRINCIPAL CAREER OFFICER RESPONSIBLE
FOR THE CONDUCT OF MILITARY OPERATIONS, NOTING THAT
WHATEVER HIS TITLE, THERE SHOULD BE ONLY ONE SPOKESMAN
FOR THE ARMED FORCES. (THERE IS A LONG AND HIGHLY
INVOLVED HISTORY OF PERSONAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS BETWEEN
IN TAM AND SOSTHENE WHICH WE ARE WORKING TO OVERCOME
SINCE THE COOPERATION OF THESE TWO IS ESSENTIAL TO
POLITICAL STABILITY IN THE SHORT TERM.)

6. COMMENT. I HAVE REPORTED IN SOME DETAIL THIS FIRST
CONVERSATION OF ANY LENGTH WITH IN TAM SINCE HE BECAME
PRIME MINISTER BECAUSE IT REFLECTS FAIRLY ACCURATELY
THE FRAGILITY OF RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE HIGH POLITICAL
COUNCIL AND THE DIFFICULTIES KHMER POLITICIANS HAVE IN
WORKING EFFECTIVELY TOGETHER. TYPICALLY, THERE IS
ALREADY SOME TALK AMONG THE KHMER, ALTHOUGH NONE OF IT
IS VERY SERIOUS, AS TO HOW LONG THE IN TAM GOVERNMENT
WILL LAST. ON THE OTHER HAND, I THINK THERE IS ALSO
A GROWING AWARENESS OF THE PRECARIOUSNESS OF THE
SITUATION WHICH COULD HELP TO MOLD THE ELITE INTO
GREATER POLITICAL SOLIDARITY THAN THEY HAVE KNOWN
SINCE 1970.

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